

Citizenship from page one

"I'm thankful to God I'm a US citizen," Us said. "I'm blessed. I think it's the will of God that he brought me here to this place."

Us is not the only person in his family who is an American citizen. His son, Arturo Jr., and his daughter both received their citizenship. His daughter is his organist and his son is pastor of El Alfa Y La Spanish in Leesville.

Both Us and his son participated in a citizenship ceremony on May 13 in Alexandria.

"I'm blessed to be an American," said Arturo Jr. "It's not easy to get citizenship and this is a big blessing in our lives. God brings blessings and this is part of it."

Others in his family are either nearing their citizenship or just beginning the process of learning English so one day they can apply to be a citizen. His son, Rueben, is pastor of Emmanuel Hispanic Baptist Church in DeRidder and is applying to become a citizen in November. Us' wife, Isabel, is still learning English and hopes to one day become a citizen as well.

Us' journey to America and pastor of El Aposento Alto Baptist Church in Florien began at a time when he believed he didn't need God in his life.

The year was 1985.

Us was enjoying a life of partying and luxury when his wife, Isabel, accepted Christ into her life. However, whenever Us was exposed to the gospel, he responded that he had plenty of money and didn't need God.

Then, one evening, everything changed.

While driving around town in his car, Us hit a taxi and was sent to jail on charges of driving while intoxicated.

"I said Lord where are you because I need you," Us

recalls. "One thing I had heard is that when you have troubles, it's time to ask God for help. He showed me His mercy and I was set free."

Once he was released from jail, Us made his decision public on Oct. 20, 1985. Immediately, this once committed partier was now a committed follower of Christ.

For the next year, Us grew in his faith while serving as a Sunday school teacher. Through this experience, Us felt called by God to go and plant a church in his home of Mereda on the Yucatan Peninsula.

The church started in Us' home, with his family and some neighbors. For the next 16 years, he continued to preach the gospel, plant churches and see lost souls saved.

While he was encouraged to see many people accept Christ and be a part of new church starts, Us felt the Lord leading him to move out of his comfort zone and into God's call for him to move to America, through learning of the need for a Spanish church in Florien after meeting a missions team from that area who had traveled to his city.

At first, Us' wife did not want to move to America. A second time Us asked, she passed on the opportunity. But on the third time, after hearing Us preach on the need to leave everything behind and follow

Christ, she agreed to follow's God's leading.

And on April 29, 2002, they moved to America for their new journey.

He arrived on a Monday and Us was instructed that the next Sunday, he would lead his first church service.

"I asked where are the people and was told you will go get them," Us said. "I got families quickly in the week before the first service on May 5. People are looking for a church and this was the only Spanish church we had in the area. They are looking to hear something they can understand."

The first Sunday, he started with nine people. And the following Sunday, 15 people came.

And that trend continued to this day, with an average of 45 coming on Sundays. Most of those attending his church are only in America for a limited time, since they must return to Mexico or another country once their Visa expires.

In addition to pastoring the church in Florien that holds services on Sunday mornings, he also serves as pastor of a mission that meets at the District 8 Association office in Natchitoches. Started in 2013, the church was begun so people who worked in the morning could attend the services, which take place at night. Average

attendance is 30.

El Aposento Alto Baptist Church is the only constituted Hispanic Baptist church that is a member of the District 8 Baptist Association, according to Ron Thompson, assistant to the coordinator of missions and ministries. Thompson said from what he has observed, Us has bountiful energy and works hard to train both congregations at Florien and Natchitoches to be missionaries.

"It is unbelievable how much energy he has and he never stops," Thompson said. "He's always on the go and doing things to increase the ministry."

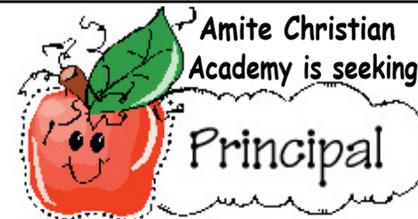
"He has a transient congregation, yet makes an impact," he continued. "His attitude

is he is sending missionaries out when they leave. He takes everyone in when he can, loves them, shares the gospel and truly develops disciples."

Since he started as pastor, Us has baptized around 500 people. He calls what God has done amazing, despite challenges he faces.

"It's hard to be pastor in America," Us said. "Our members do not live close to the church; they are living far away. Sometimes I get a call at midnight saying preacher someone gave you our phone number and ask for translator. Or I travel 75 miles to visit someone to come to church on Sunday or who need counseling. It's harder than Mexico but I love to do it."

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